

Title: Arrival into Dawson

Objectives: To help build a mental picture of the town of Dawson in the spring of 1898; To understand that only disappointment awaited many of the newly arriving Stampeders; To make a final decision – should the Stampeders stay in Dawson or return back home?

Materials:

journals

pencil

photographs of Dawson

Time: 1 hour

Lesson Description:

1. Begin with a whole class discussion with teacher saying the following:

Finally! Finally, after days of being on the river in our boats we arrive at Dawson – the city of GOLD! Much to our disappointment we discover Dawson is nothing but a shabby town with rivers of mud for streets. “Some newcomers didn’t even get off their boats when they saw the filthy streets of Dawson. Others promptly put their outfits up for sale and headed for the Outside. But, other newcomers were so eager to explore the new territory that they ran into town without tying their boats to shore.” We also find the townspeople of Dawson are on the brink of starvation! They have been eating nothing but rations of beans for many months over the long winter since they ran out of food. One man arrived onto shore earlier this spring with a boatful of eggs. In less than an hour, the happy businessman had sold his entire stock of 2,000 eggs at \$18 a dozen. We’re shocked to learn that dozens of people are dying from a disease known as typhoid fever. “One man wrote home to his wife-should anyone ask you what I think of their coming here, tell them that my candid advice is for them to stay where they are!” As we walk farther into the city we can see hundreds of townsfolk

gathered at the town hall all listening to one man reading a newspaper aloud. As it turns out this man purchased this grease-stained, outdated (weeks-old) newspaper from a newly arrived Stampeder for \$15.00. Everyone there paid \$1.00 to hear the news from the outside from the only American newspaper in town!

Share photographs of Dawson in the early day of the gold rush to give a visual to students. Ask students to share what they think life was like in Dawson at this time. Continue discussion:

People called us “Cheechakos” an Indian word for newcomers. But, we didn’t mind because we were so excited to stake our claim! To our dismay, we found that every gold-bearing creek and hillside for miles around have been staked for months. As we walked around Dawson we found many happy people celebrating spring-clean up. We found ourselves among thousands of people roaming the city without anything to do because much of the land was claimed. The city had a huge population by 1898. The population had grown from 1,500 to 30,000 in only one year. We found some people selling their supplies for money to get back home. Dawson was not what we expected!

What are we going to do? We have to make a decision. Are we going to stay in Dawson City, go back home or try to find land? If we stay in Dawson City that means we need to set up a business or find jobs and build ourselves homes. We could try to find someone that is trying to sell their claim and buy their land. Or, we could sell our supplies and head back home.

2. As a method of debate do the Human Continuum. Present the first question: Should we stay in Dawson City? Have students line-up against a wall making a continuum. One end of the continuum is for those that strongly agree that they should stay while the other end is for the students who disagree. Have each child explain why he/she chose to stand where he/she did.

3. Students write in their journals about this experience. Students should begin by describing their arrival into Dawson using descriptive language and details about the experience. Students should include factual information given during the discussion. Each student should also include their individual plan for the future. Are they planning on staying in Dawson?

What will they start a new business in Dawson? Will they try to buy a piece of land already staked? Or, will they sell their supplies and head back home?

TEACHER NOTES: Students will be surprised to learn that not everyone found wealth in gold. In fact very few people did.

